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REASONABLE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY: A CRITICISM

C. S. WOODS
State University of Iowa

The article by Professor Blackmar entitled "Reasonable Department of Sociology for Colleges and Universities"¹ must have attracted the attention and claimed the interest of all the readers of the September number of the *American Journal of Sociology*.

He who attempts to formulate a program for this rapidly evolving and widely comprehensive science or combination of sciences has courage, to say the least. And Professor Blackmar has rendered a useful service in presenting an outline that doubtless commends itself to most persons who study it.

The thing that seems very important to any of us is almost sure to be thrust upon others whenever the opportunity occurs. And my excuse for writing this short article is that Professor Blackmar omitted what I consider to be a logical and useful item in the formation of his reasonable department of sociology.

He provides in Group IV for practical social service work for advanced students and instructors. This is a wise provision. But the precedents for much of it so far as I can see have been neglected. They may be cryptic and expected by the author to be revealed to students and instructors when they follow certain courses. But if students are preparing to work with agencies whose efforts are preventive and constructive, they ought to have some special instruction that will help them intelligently to do this work.

There is no specific mention of a course in this scheme that gives the student the opportunity to study the social side of some of those problems that are basic to the preservation of the physical and mental well-being of the people of the community. The desires of every individual may perhaps be expressed by the words, health, wealth, knowledge, sociability, beauty, rightness. And people are physically, mentally, and, in some degree at least, morally

¹ *American Journal of Sociology*, XX (1914), 261.

efficient as they are able to realize these desires. But how shall people realize these desires? The answer to this question is the purpose and end of practical, social efforts. The student, therefore, should have a course devoted to the study of the community interests in such subjects as water, milk, and food supply, the prevention of disease, vital statistics, physical conditions of shops and factories, the normal protective forces of the human body, and certain other questions that form a rather distinctive group.

In the University of Iowa a course in social hygiene is given in the department of sociology. The course is begun by reference to the fact that the dreamers made the supply of our basic needs the foundation of ideal communities. Plato, in his *Republic*, makes the point, when he sets out to build a city (community), that our indigence must be recognized and provided for first of all. He then proceeds to set forth the meaning of justice. But without the wisest and best provisions for the things on which men, women, and children primarily depend, justice is a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

Students should know something of social pathology, remedial and correctional measures and institutions; but these are only sequences. Vagrancy, for instance, is not a primary condition in most cases. To what is vagrancy due? A report of a study of vagrancy among two thousand men in the New York municipal lodging-house during March of the present year reveals the interesting fact that a large percentage of the men were physically defective. The defectiveness of whatever sort was in some cases the essential, and in others the contributory, cause of the vagrancy. The student of sociology should be taught somewhere some things about the prevention of disease, "for preventive medicine has become a basic factor in sociology." It is impossible to say just how powerfully the morals of people are influenced by bad housing, but we know the conditions for the breaking-down of modesty and the establishment of undue intimacy are often present in poorly lighted, badly arranged, and inadequately equipped houses. And, interestingly enough, the housing problem has usually been considered to be sanitary and hygienic in its nature; but it is more broadly sociologic.

The relation of the health of the individual to his occupation is almost sure to be overlooked unless the student or social worker has some knowledge of the fact that industrial hygiene deals with such matters as the health, welfare, and human rights of the worker.

Let me illustrate in a simple way the necessity for special attention to these questions. Suppose a man does work which requires him to be on his feet all the day. He ultimately fails to get to his work. He becomes an applicant for charitable aid. He complains of pain in his feet. He is sent to the dispensary and receives treatment. Absence from his work relieves him, but when he goes to work again his pain recurs. Now what that man needs is not medicine but a job that will allow him to sit down. He has flattening foot arches.

If the social worker wants to be of real service he must not neglect the things on which men and women live. (The physician at the dispensary should not fail to recognize this point.) The water and food supply, the housing conditions, the prevention of diseases, etc., are community problems. The families and other groups must depend upon the efficiency of certain forces that are at work for their protection and amelioration. And the student ought to have some notion of what these are.

The objection may be made that the student cannot know everything that may have some real or imaginary relation to sociology. And yet if he must omit some things in order to have time for others, he surely ought not to fail to get a notion of those forces that contribute to the improvement of the basic conditions of daily living.

We attempt in our course in social hygiene to help the student to get a constructive view of certain social efforts. It is applied sociology, but we present the facts before we try to apply them. And finally we show the relation between the various agencies, such as boards of health, and the individual, the family, and the entire community.

It is only fair to say that Professor Blackmar has given place in one or another division of his program for subjects which we think belong to a logical course in social hygiene.